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Over the past decade, the reserve force has evolved from a strategic role to an integrated operational role. As a routine force provider within the force generation model, the reserves have been participating in continuous mobilizations in a variety of capacities in order to meet Department of Defense (DoD) mission requirements. Despite efforts to keep the reserve operational after withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan the historical trends indicate that the reserve force will be returned to a strategic status. While the operational reserve supports DoD's stated goals of Total Force use going forward and provides the reserves with continuous real world training and contingency opportunities, it fails to account for the single most important element facing the military today: that being the financial crisis facing the United States. Impending fiscal cuts will reduce manpower, equipment, overseas training and operations activities. These cuts will most certainly impact the ability to leverage the operational reserve concept. The vitality of the operational reserve hinges on funding and without adequate justification for the funds, will force the reserves back into a strategic role.

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(703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

United States Marine Corps  
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Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
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## MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Evolution of the Marine Corps Reserve:

Historical Trends Post Conflict and the Future of the Operational Reserve

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### AUTHOR:

Major Matthew S. Breen, USMCR

AY 11-12

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: JW. Gordon

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 3 May 2012

Oral Defense Committee Member: DONALD F. BITNER, Ph.D.

Approved: [Signature]

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Title:** Evolution of the Marine Corps Reserve: Historical Trends Post Conflict and the Future of the Operational Reserve

**Author:** Major Matthew S. Breen, United States Marine Corps Reserve

**Thesis:** The Marine Corps will return its reserve forces to a pre-September 11, 2001, strategic status and the operational reserve will be limited to annual training in support of operational missions.

**Discussion:** Over the past decade, the reserve force has evolved from a strategic role to an integrated operational role. As a routine force provider within the force generation model, the reserves have been participating in continuous mobilizations in a variety of capacities in order to meet Department of Defense (DoD) mission requirements. Despite this constant operational status, the Marine Corps has yet to clearly define an *operational reserve*. While much has been debated and written on the subject, the fact remains that each service is left to interpret its own definition. Beyond defining the term operational reserve, there is the deliberate effort to keep the reserve operational after the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan is complete. While this supports DoD's stated goals of *Total Force* use going forward and provides the reserves with continuous real world training and contingency opportunities, it fails to account for the single most important element facing the military today: that being the financial crisis facing the United States. Impending fiscal cuts will scale down manpower, equipment, overseas training and operations activities. These cuts will most certainly impact the ability to leverage the operational reserve concept that has evolved as a result of military operations over the past decade. DoD leaders recognize the importance of the reserve and acknowledge that the Total Force concept favors an operational reserve; however, given current laws and fiscal constraints, the longevity of an operational reserve is quickly becoming a steeper mountain to climb.

**Conclusion:** The DoD budget and national security requirements will ultimately decide whether or not an operational reserve will continue to exist. Without a national crisis to justify funding for the mobilization of the reserves, budgets simply will not support an operational reserve force. Despite support from military leadership, the active component is not likely to fund the reserves without an increase in baseline budgets or the continuation of supplemental funds. Additionally, in the absence of contingency missions, the active component is likely to resume the training missions that were given to the reserve component. This will place the reserve force back into a strategic role.

## **PREFACE**

Much analysis of the role of the nation's military reserve has been conducted since the Global War on Terror began in 2001. The evolution of the reserve forces from an emergency option only to a more integrated or operational role continues to be the subject of much debate. For the Marine Corps, the reserves have served alongside the active component for eight continuous years in a variety of capacities. Despite nearly a decade of continuous use, the Marine Corps has yet to define the meaning of the term: operational reserve. The services and the think tanks continue to throw the term around in various hearings, articles and reports. I chose this topic because I believe the Marine Corps should do what it has always done and seize the initiative with the issue of an operational reserve.

But even if operational reserve is defined, there still looms the challenge of making the operational reserve a reality in the post conflict environment: and that challenge is funding. With the recent Department of Defense budget cuts, it remains to be seen whether an operational reserve force can be justified and funded. Given the current fiscal direction and history of reserve force status after conflict, I predict that the reserves will be, for the most part, returned to a strategic role with very limited operational activity.

My thanks go out to my wife and my mom for their relentless support and contribution to my effort in completing this endeavor. I would also like to thank my mentors Colonel David Antonik, Dr. Bradford Wineman and Dr. John Gordon for the sacrifice of their time in providing me with much needed guidance and direction in my research.

## **Introduction**

Throughout the past decade, the United States Marine Corps Reserve has been operationally employed for a longer period of time than at any other time in Marine Corps history. Many Department of Defense studies and reports have claimed that this trend shows a transition from what was previously known as a strategic, emergency-only reserve, to an active, integrated force, which has been termed an operational reserve. The recent historical trend has seen a reliance on the reserve component to help meet mission requirements which have strained the active component.<sup>1</sup> This new operational reserve practice proved to be far different from the “normal” planned concept of utilization, prior to 2001. For the Marine Corps Reserve, the opportunity to prove itself as a capable and reliable force for the first time since Operation Desert Storm in 1991 had arrived.

The United States Marine Corps, like the other services, is facing record budget reductions as the war in Iraq has ended and the war in Afghanistan is being brought to a close. For the Department of Defense and the military at large, the resulting impact will be tremendous in terms of diminished funding for all armed forces. The constrained budget, combined with the priority for reducing the overseas commitment of troops, will most certainly result in a significantly decreased role for the nation’s reserve forces and, in particular, the Marine Corps Reserve. The number of reserves and the duration of time for which they are used will be minimal, based on the fact that the justification for appropriating additional funding simply won’t exist. Department of Defense policies of the last decade, coupled with current national security strategy and developing world events, will likely continue to drive the requirement for reserve component utilization in some capacity.

The Marine Corps' shrinking budget, coupled with reduced mission requirements for the active component will most certainly have an impact on reserve operational mission opportunities. No longer engaged in Iraq, and with the beginning of withdrawal from Afghanistan, the active component will likely resume many of the training missions it had tasked the reserve component to fill in order to provide some much needed temporary operational relief. Supplemental funds above the Marine Corps baseline budget have supported the reserve component throughout the past decade. These supplemental funds are projected to decrease significantly in the near future, as the United States shifts the majority of its forces out of Afghanistan. It is for these reasons that the Marine Corps will be forced to return the majority of its reserve forces to a pre-September 11, 2001 strategic status. It is unlikely the Marine Corps will choose to utilize active component baseline funds to support an operational reserve if the active component will be able to meet mission requirements.

### **Historical Role of the Marine Corps Reserve**

“It must always be remembered that these so called “Reservist” are the Marines with whom we will win or lose our next war...We are collectively, the Corps. Never let it be thought that one can survive without the other.”<sup>2</sup> [Sic] This quote was taken from a presentation prepared by the Division of Reserve which was provided to members of the 1957 class of The Senior School, the name by which the Command and Staff College, Quantico Virginia, was designated at various points in its past. The statement portrays a Marine Corps perspective five years after the Korean War experience which acknowledges, full well, the critical role the reserve played in turning the tide of that war and in maintaining the reputation of the Marine Corps as “America’s Force in Readiness.”



An examination of the future role of the Marine Corps Reserve could hardly be complete without first reviewing its history and evolution. Although not officially recognized by the United States Government, Marine Corps reserve units existed within the Naval Militia program dating back to 1892. At that time, individual states managed and controlled their militia units.<sup>3</sup> In 1903, Congress passed the Militia Act, also called the Dick Act, which preserved the state militia system, regulated it, and established it as a reserve of manpower for Federal Government use if so directed by the President.<sup>4</sup> Although Army specific, the Dick Act established a foundation between the state militia and the regular Army by creating a federally funded and organized militia subject to standards and inspection. Thus, key groundwork was set for marked improvements between state and federal military forces. With the stage set by the Dick Act, the Navy, recognizing the difficulty involved in trying to harness manpower and equipment capabilities in the event of a national emergency, initiated action to take ownership through General Order No. 153 on 10 July 1915.<sup>5</sup> A direct result of this action was the Navy's documented recognition of the Marine Corps Branch of the Naval Militia. Another year passed before Congress officially established the Marine Corps Reserve through the Naval Appropriations Act on 29 August 1916.<sup>6</sup>

From this beginning, Marines of the Marine Corps Reserve went on to serve in World War I, helping to solidify the Marine Corps reputation as the premier elite fighting force of the world, as was distinguished at the Battle Belleau Wood in France. During World War I, reserve Marines were integrated into regular component Marine units. Precise units and numbers of reserves were never accurately recorded.

It was not long after World War I ended before the authorized strength of the Marine Corps was reduced and the number of reserves began to dwindle. During that time, the reserve

concept was so new that few had an understanding of what to do with the reserve other than to demobilize them. Prior to and following the war, no Marine Corps headquarters had been assigned responsibility for ownership of the reserve program and the program's usefulness was in question as appropriations and manning numbers continued to decline.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing the significant role the reserve had with influencing the Marine Corps successful participation in World War I, Marine Corps leadership expressed a desire to maintain the strategic capability that the reserve provided. Congress passed the Naval Reserve Act of 1925, which abolished the 1916 Naval Appropriations Act and "provided for the creation, organization, administration, and maintenance of a Naval Reserve and a Marine Corps Reserve."<sup>8</sup> The 1925 Act detailed solutions to many of the shortcomings of the 1916 Act; most importantly, pay for drill attendance, uniform allowance and subsistence during weekend duty.<sup>9</sup>

Four years later, the status of the reserve changed again as the Marine Corps budget dwindled. The Commandant approved a plan for what was called the "New Reserve." It consisted of drill without pay, individual responsibility for purchase of uniforms and the use of private funds to cover expenses associated with reserve activities.<sup>10</sup> The regular Marine Corps left the reserve on their own, responsible for providing for their own training, messing and quartering.<sup>11</sup> Despite the difficult conditions for service in the reserve, the "New Reserve" program expanded and numbers increased as dedicated volunteers filled the ranks. The Marines of this period in history displayed exceptional dedication by paying to participate in the Marine Corps Reserve.

In the late 1920s as the Great Depression set in, the individual reservists' ability and desire to sacrifice scarce personal funds dwindled and the "New Reserve" concept began to lose appeal. Personnel turnover increased significantly and the regular Marine Corps realized that

unreasonable burdens placed on the reserves were taking a toll. At that time, reserve leadership had modeled the reserve on a brigade structure, which brought challenges with command and control beyond the capabilities of the reserves. In addition, the Marine Corps and its reserve were struggling with finding its ideal size and determining the type of units necessary to meet its mission.<sup>12</sup> The regular Marine Corps soon realized that if they were to remain “First to Fight”, they needed a reserve that was manned, trained, equipped and ready for rapid mobilization for active duty service. In June of 1934, pay for drill was reinstated by the Marine Corps and the reserve program saw, yet another, significant change in organizational structure in order to help reduce operating expenses associated with the reserve.<sup>13</sup> The regular Marine Corps, and military in general, viewed the reserve as an emergency asset that should be maintained in the event of national crisis. According to this concept, when crisis arose, justification for funding mobilization of a reserve force would exist and the reserve would augment active forces for the war’s duration.

Following World War I, the Marine Corps faced the new challenge of managing its reserve force. The reserve was officially created in 1916, as the War in Europe was heating up and United States civil and military leadership recognized an urgent need to be ready to defend American interests.<sup>14</sup> To do so, the force would need to be built up immediately and a reserve would significantly ease that process. On the heels of the Navy, the Marine Corps Reserve was created and it served its intended purpose. However, after recognizing the strategic importance of the reserve, the active Marine Corps struggled with how to manage the reserve. Despite oversight and management challenges, the Marine Corps Reserve remained a critical element of the Marine Corps’ strategic plan, that plan being one of utilization in case of war or national emergency. The necessity of a reserve was evidenced by the comments of the Marine Corps

Commandant in 1926 when he said, “a trained force of officers and men available to serve as reinforcements to the Regular Marine Corps in time of War or national emergency. To make it possible to carry out this mission, it is absolutely necessary that there be in the Marine Corps prior to the emergency and adequate and well trained Reserve.”<sup>15</sup> [Sic]

As World War II brewed in Europe, the Marine Corps called on its reserve to begin augmenting the active component even before the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941. The reserve was absorbed entirely into the regular Marine Corps and by war’s end, reserves constituted approximately 68 percent of total Marine Corps forces.<sup>16</sup> At the conclusion of World War II, much like after World War I, the Marine Corps Reserve was demobilized and total end strength for the active component was significantly reduced. The Marine Corps Reserve had again served its intended purpose and was returned to a non-active strategic status. Unlike after World War I, the Marine Corps assigned a Director of the Division of Reserve and the goal this time was clear. The role of the Director was to rebuild a strong reserve to ensure the ability to fill its mission of responding in the event of national emergency.<sup>17</sup> To this end, the Marine Corps invested resources into the reserve which it had not previously done. The efforts were to pay off as the United States Marine Corps emerged from the investment with a trained, equipped and ready reserve at the onset of the Korean War: a war in which it is widely believed that the Marine Corps Reserve was, to a large extent, the difference between victory and defeat.

When the Korean War ended, the Marine Corps, again, found itself needing to rebuild its reserve. As in World War I and World War II, the reserve Marines did not deploy as units but, rather, they integrated into the active component. Essentially, the reserve units ceased to exist until they reconstituted after the war’s end.<sup>18</sup> After the fighting ended in Korea, the Marine Corps faced reduced budgets and decreases in active component end strength. Much like after

World War I and World War II, the reserves demobilized rapidly and returned to their prewar reserve units. The Marine Corps, building upon the value of historical lessons learned, immediately shifted focus to rebuilding the reserve. Retaining experienced personnel was complicated due to a postwar desire to return to civilian life; lives which had been left behind in a shockingly rapid and historic mobilization for war.

Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson, emphasized the importance of the reserves when he commented “the Nation would depend even more on reserve forces in the future.”<sup>19</sup> He recognized that the reserves had to become a critical integrated component of national defense to supplement active component forces.<sup>20</sup> The combination of Marine Corps active and reserve forces strongly impacted and turned the tide of the Korean War. This fact was well recognized and shaped how United States leadership viewed strategic reserve capability as the United States entered the Cold War era, following the end of the Korean War. Recognizing the need for change based on developments in the world, the Marine Corps again reorganized its reserve to best suit evolving world needs of the time, while retaining its clearly defined yet simple and concise mission statement.

In the Vietnam War, the United States experienced a significant departure from its historical use of reserve forces. Unlike World War I, World War II, and the Korean War, the Marine Corps Reserves were not mobilized *en masse*. Instead, manpower for the Vietnam War was obtained through the draft. In 1962, the Marine Corps reorganized its reserve once again; this time to mirror the active component with a division and a wing that would eventually lead to a complete reserve Marine Amphibious Force known as IV MAF. This reorganization provided the Marine Corps with a fourth Marine Amphibious Force, replicating the active component structure and ensuring unit integrity within the reserve.<sup>21</sup> The Marine Corps Reserve had been

reorganized into a 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division and a 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing and they were to remain organizationally intact if called to active service. The new concept was designed around reserve unit integrity in peacetime and through mobilization and deployment in the event of activation. This was a significant shift in the reserve employment compared to the previous use of reserves as individual fillers which were integrated into active component units.<sup>22</sup> Some theories suggest that the reserves were not used during the Vietnam War because of a larger fear of communist aggression in other areas of the world; this fear resulted in belief that forces needed to be reserved for war with communist Russia. Other theories point to a reluctance on the part of government for sending the wrong message to the rest of the world by the President declaring national emergency in order to justify mobilizing the reserves.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of influences, the Sixties marked a shift in perception and concept with how the reserve was to be structured and employed.

The period following the Vietnam War reflected the same pattern of budget and troop reductions as had occurred after World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. With the exception of individual volunteers, the Marine Corps Reserve did not experience mobilization during the Vietnam War; however, military budgets were reduced and manpower endstrength was cut. Two adverse points regarding the reserve did occur after the Vietnam experience: first, was a negative perception cast on the reserve as a hideout for those seeking to avoid service in Vietnam and, second, the relevancy and utility of the reserve was questioned by some as a result of the reserve not being mobilized.<sup>24</sup> During the postwar period, the reserve experienced recurring challenges associated with manpower recruiting, retention, equipment fielding and funding, just as in past wars.

After the Vietnam War, the Department of Defense recognized propositions brought forward by General Creighton Abrams, which was subsequently codified in what is now referred to as the Abrams Doctrine, which asserts that support from citizens of the United States during war is directly related to mobilization of the reserves. This belief served to facilitate the Total Force concept which Defense Secretary Melvin Laird signed into policy in 1970.<sup>25</sup> With elimination of the draft and the adoption of an all-volunteer force, the reserve component would become all the more critical to United States national security. In order to cope with reduced budgets and troop reductions, certain assets and capabilities were transferred to the reserve component. This move served two purposes: first, it achieved significant savings and second, in the event of a crisis, it required mobilization of the reserve to round out the active component, thus drawing on support and will of the nation's citizens.<sup>26</sup>

Because the Marine Corps Reserve never mobilized in support of the Vietnam War, the new reserve structure and the Total Force concept remained untested for two decades until Operation Desert Storm. In 1991, in response to Saddam Hussein's aggression, the Marine Corps Reserve experienced the largest mobilization since the Korean War. When the United States went to war with Iraq, in Operation Desert Storm, the Marine Corps Reserve mobilized 63 percent of its forces, and despite skepticism surrounding their reliability, they performed as advertised; both as whole units and as individual augments.<sup>27</sup> Despite its challenges, the Total Force concept proved to be an overall stunning success. Because of the short duration of this war, most reserve Marines served less than a year of active duty before demobilizing and returning to reserve status. Expectedly, as in past wars, the military budgets were reduced, resulting in force downsizing. Both active and reserve components experienced drawdown with the Marine Corps Reserve programmed end strength of 42,400 in 1992, lowering to a total end

strength of 34,900 in 1997. Overall, reserve forces experienced a 26 percent reduction as compared to the 36 percent experienced by the active component.<sup>28</sup> The assumption can be made that Congress embraced the Total Force concept that realized the significance of reserve success in Operation Desert Storm; therefore, under fiscal constraints, chose to minimize reserve end strength reduction numbers as compared to that of the active side.

From World War I through the Korean War, the Marine Corps reserve proved to be a vital element of Marine Corps success. Evolution of the reserve through all of these wars brought about significant changes in reserve management during peacetime. In wartime, the concept for integrating the reserves was upon mobilization and activation, reserve units were disbanded and the reservists were utilized as individual fillers, which were integrated into the regular Marine Corps structure.<sup>29</sup>

The National Security situation changed after the end of the Cold War and the Marine Corps, like the other services, began to realize that their reserve would play an ever-increasing role in meeting mission requirements. Department of Defense and military officials recognized that reserve component access policies based on the Cold War era plans were outdated and needed to be changed to reflect the evolving world situation and reduced defense budgets.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the history of the Marine Corps Reserve, as the nation has moved into interwar periods following conflicts, the military has faced budget reductions, force reductions and force structure adjustments.

Reserve Marines participated in World War I in limited numbers and in World War II over half of the Marines who served were reserve.<sup>31</sup> Again during the Korean War, reserve Marines were called to duty and comprised a large portion of the total Marine force. Following these wars, the natural cycle of troop and budget reductions has occurred. Moreover, after each



of these cycles, the reserve component returned to a strategic status after a period of continuous mobilization. While this is an overarching analysis leaving much detail and unique circumstance from each conflict out of the discussion, there remains one common theme: once the conflict has ended, the reserve force returns to its pre-conflict status, defense budgets are reduced, and the military experiences a drawdown in manpower and equipment. During the Persian Gulf War, again, the Marine Corps drew on its reserve to support the mission and at the conclusion of the conflict, repeated the same pattern of cuts in the budget, force reductions, both active and reserve component, with a return of the reserve to a strategic status. In more recent history, with the events of September 11, 2001, the Marine Corps reserve has experienced an atypical pattern in that the conflict has endured beyond that of past conflicts involving reserve force utilization.

### **Modern Role of the Marine Corps Reserve**

“the trend in rising defense costs (particularly in manpower) and ever descending defense budgets will provide fiscal constraints calling for continuous consideration of reduced active forces and increased reliance on reserve forces.”<sup>32</sup>

This assumption, taken from the Ready Reserve Mission and Structure Study Final Report released in 1981, bears a strikingly similar parallel to the conditions found in 2012. The Global War on Terror period from September 11, 2001, to the present, is distinctly different from previous wars because the reserve component has been relied upon in a new way, to provide operational tempo relief to the active component on a rotational basis for duration greater than that of any past conflicts. For the Marine Corps, this continuous use of reserves is a significant departure from historical utilization, born out of necessity, and transformed into a sustained practice. With national security being the driving force behind such a requirement, justification for funding and mobilization of reserve forces has remained in effect since September 2001.

As pointed out by Commandant of the Marine Corps General Amos, the reserves today possess more experience than at any other time since the Korean War; and they have achieved seamless integration with the active component, given the operational opportunities that have been presented to them.<sup>33</sup> In addition to combat experience, today's Marine Corps Reserve has a broad depth of experience across a variety of operations both inside the continental United States and abroad. Maintaining this experience is critical and the Marine Corps as well as the Department of Defense recognize that in order to maintain such experience, the reserve must remain engaged with meaningful work to retain experienced personnel.

### **Marine Corps Concept of Operational Reserve**

Since 2006, significant steps have been taken by the Department of Defense to further support inclusion of the reserve component into the Total Force concept. Reviews, reports, commissions, and independent research studies; as well as law, policy, doctrine changes and change proposals have all focused, since 2001, on crisis necessitated evolution of the reserve component, on the best way to move forward with this evolution process.

One such example is Department of Defense Directive 1200.17 "Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force." The Directive's stated purpose is to "promote and support the management of the reserve component as an operational force."<sup>34</sup> The Directive further lists as policy: "The reserve components provide operational capabilities and strategic depth."<sup>35</sup> The key words are "promote and support" in the Directive's purpose and it does not specify that the reserve component as an operational force is mandatory or permanent. Included in the Directive's glossary is a definition for "reserve component as an operational force," which provides the reader with a basic understanding as to what the Department of Defense meant by the term "operational force."<sup>36</sup>

In accordance with Department of Defense guidance, the Marine Corps has embraced the Total Force concept; which directs that the reserve component function as an operational force.<sup>37</sup> Despite progress, the Marine Corps lacks its own definition for operational reserve. The Marine Corps has struggled to clearly define its idea of an operational reserve and depending on whom one talks to, understanding and interpretation of the meaning varies widely.<sup>38</sup> Irrespective, the term should be dropped entirely since it engenders confusion, which was recognized by the 2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component.<sup>39</sup>

The Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, released by the Commandant in July 2008, listed: “Maintain a Ready and Sustainable Reserve” as number nine out of ten prioritized objectives.<sup>40</sup> Contained in the paragraph were key words such as “Total Force,” “operational,” and “strategic.” The Commandant was clearly indicating the Marine Corps’ commitment to embracing the Total Force concept, as well as the fact that the Marine Corps Reserve force would be serving in both operational and strategic capacities. Research identified earlier indicated a common understanding of the term “strategic reserve.” However, research conducted has yielded no official internal Marine Corps definition for the term “operational reserve.”

Interestingly, a large majority of literature written about the operational reserve has focused on the Air Force, the Army, and the National Guard. In fact, testimony by the services to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense in March of 2011, lacked Marine Corps representation as service reserve leadership provided their reasons for needing to keep the operational reserve alive.<sup>41</sup> Each of these services has a significant amount of capability contained in their reserve component that either does not exist in the active component or has very limited depth of capability without augmentation from the reserve component. The Marine Corps, unlike the Air Force and the Army, is relatively new to the operational reserve business

because it did not begin to operationalize its reserve in the form of continuous rotations until around 2003. The Marine Corps Reserve mirrors the active component Marine Corps with the exception of mortuary affairs, which resides entirely in the reserve structure. The Marine Corps Reserve is primarily general purpose, like its active component counterpart, mirroring it in organizational structure and capabilities.

The United States has reached the point where budget reductions are mandatory, which likely means a significant dwindling requirement to use the Marine Corps Reserve as an operational force. In Dr. John Winkler's article: "Developing an Operational Reserve, A Policy and Historical Context and the Way Forward," he describes the effects of DoD Directive 1200.17, which outlines policy for managing the operational reserve and covers the broad concept of how the operational reserve idea is to become a reality. While simple in print, the task in reality is quite different as the Marine Corps would be required to appropriate funding from its own budget since supplemental funds are projected to diminish. Despite attempts to budget for additional funding to support an operational reserve, the reality is that with deep budget cuts already underway for the Department of Defense, it is antithetical to presume that new programs could be brought into existence. If this prediction holds true, this would leave the Marine Corps with only one option to realize an operational reserve; namely, utilizing active component funds to support the reserve component operational force. This is unlikely to happen without mandated force structure cuts from the active component, which would force the Services to be more reliant upon reserve component forces.

The key word throughout the Department of Defense for support of the operational reserve is "predictable." This is interesting in that predictability would imply knowing future requirements; and if these future requirements were to be continuous, then it would stand to

reason that the active component would be sized appropriately to meet this constant demand. Utilizing the reserve bears an expense and continuous utilization expenses have not been proven to be any less costly than those of the active component.<sup>42</sup>

The term *operational reserve* does exist in Joint Publication 1-02 (JP 1-02) and is defined as “An emergency reserve of men and/or materiel established for the support of a specific operation.”<sup>43</sup> This definition, however, seems outdated, and is not particularly helpful since the term operational reserve has evolved to mean something entirely different according to Department of Defense Directive 1200.17. The Directives modified definition bears semblance to what has actually occurred with the reserves over the past decade, unlike the previously mentioned definition contained in JP 1-02.

When phrases such as operational reserve are coined, logic should prevail for clarity, definition and understanding. It should be standard practice that they be defined before being used. Merriam-Webster’s definitions for the word operational include: “of, engaged in, or connected with execution of military or naval operations in campaign or battle” and “ready for or in condition to undertake a destined function.”<sup>44</sup> Moving to the word “reserve,” Merriam-Webster defines it as: “keep back,” “to retain or hold over to a future time or place,” “to set or have set aside or apart.”<sup>45</sup> What seems to prevail through definition, when putting these two words together is a bit of an oxymoron, depending upon one’s interpretation of the definitions.

Despite continued use of the term operational reserve the Department of Defense has instead opted to officially define “Reserve Components” as an “operational force.” Any democratic attempt to define operational reserve could easily be debated beyond a reasonable time as few are able to come to complete agreement given the complexities associated with definition and meaning of each word: operational and reserve. For the sake of establishing

common understanding of terms, the Marine Corps should drop the use of the term “operational reserve” as recommended in the 2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component.<sup>46</sup>

### **Vitality of the Marine Corps Operational Reserve**

After ten years of sustained operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States appears to be on the brink of an interwar period. Operation Iraqi Freedom has ended. Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan has a timeline for withdrawal and is starting to wind down as troops begin to leave. However, while the active component Marine Corps end strength is being reduced from 202,000 to 182,000, the reserve component will remain untouched in the 2013 defense budget.<sup>47</sup> In fact, despite the drawdown, the Marine Corps will still have a higher end strength than before September 11, 2001. This is a significant signal from the Department of Defense for the Marine Corps in light of all the other services’ reductions. Possibly, this can be attributed to the President’s shifting focus to the Asia Pacific, where the vast expanse of ocean lends itself to the Marine Corps amphibious roots.

As Defense Secretary Leon Panetta points out in the 2012 strategic guidance entitled, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities For 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense,” the reserves have proven their vitality and the United States will continue to rely on their service.<sup>48</sup> However, his comment regarding the appropriate active component and reserve component mix leaves much room for interpretation. In essence, he is saying that use of the reserve component will depend upon the nation’s security needs.<sup>49</sup>

Fiscal resources from the defense budget, specifically the Marine Corps budget, will be the single most important factor responsible for shaping how the reserves might be used in the future. For all its positive attributes, Department of Defense Directive 1200.17 neglects to

address a detailed plan for funding an operational reserve. The reserve, being a part-time force, offers a certain cost- savings benefit as compared to that of the full-time active component force.<sup>50</sup> With the continuing decline in defense dollars, the answer seems to point to the reserve force as the best option for insuring national security while the active component is drawn-down. The DoD has only provided funding for the minimal reservist training period; thus, anything beyond the annual training dollars requires additional funds. The Marine Corps, like the other services, has met that fiscal requirement through use of supplemental funds. As long as these funds remain available, the Marine Corps can afford its operational reserve without dipping into its own operating budget.<sup>51</sup> The release of the current administrations 2012 National Strategic Guidance, coupled with Congress' failure to agree on a future budget for the Department of Defense, the issue of funding the operational reserve must be readdressed in light of the new fiscal developments.<sup>52</sup>

Because of the national debt crisis and the resulting budget reduction imposed on the Department of Defense, the Marine Corps operational reserve force, as it is currently known today, will cease to exist unless the Marine Corps is able to add the funding required for sustaining an operational reserve into its baseline budget.

A 2002 Quadrennial Defense Review of Reserve Component Contributions to National Defense identified the reserve components as a cost-effective way of sustaining the force but specified that in order to fund their utilization beyond their normal budgeted minimal readiness state training levels, supplemental funds would need to be found to pay for their use.<sup>53</sup> In 2006, a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies concluded that “budgetary and policy framework to support the Reserve Component as part of the operational force has not yet been created.”<sup>54</sup> The 2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component

conducted by the Department of Defense recommended that to ensure implementation of Department of Defense Directive 1200.17, the department would need to program costs associated with reserve component use in the base budget.<sup>55</sup>

In 2011, Headquarters Marine Corps identified operational requirements for fiscal year 2013 that would necessitate the use of reserve component forces.<sup>56</sup> These requirements fell outside of current contingency operations, such as Combatant Commander Theater Security Cooperation, exercises and rotational force requirements, and are typically difficult to source requirements by active component Marine Corps forces. These events were used to construct baseline funding requirements to support operational use of the reserve. This initiative was considered by programmatic planners during Program Objective Memorandum (POM)-13 and subsequently was rejected for funding. As a result, the Marine Corps decided to continue to utilize supplemental funds for fiscal year 2013 and recompet the initiative during POM-14.<sup>57</sup> Clearly, as long as the Services are able to rely upon supplemental funding to pay for utilization of the reserves, there is no imperative to address programmatic requirements in the baseline budget. This places the fate of the operational reserve at the mercy of Service funding, thereby, delaying the implementation of Department of Defense recommendations found in the “2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component.”<sup>58</sup> This very recommendation dates back to the “2001 Quadrennial Defense Review,” which identified an absolute requirement to baseline operational reserve funds.<sup>59</sup>

Marine Corps operations in Iraq have concluded and the focus of effort shifted to support the mission in Afghanistan. The current administration has outlined a withdrawal timeline which has already resulted in troop strength reductions.<sup>60</sup> This has affected reserve force generation plans, resulting in a dramatic reduction of reserve force requirements to supporting Marine Air



Ground Task Force operations in Afghanistan. The resultant consequence will be that justification for supplemental funding necessary to support use of reserve forces is rapidly dwindling. Given the historical pattern, identified since World War I, of force downsizing and budget reductions, the challenge will be finding what the “2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component” referred to as “predictable” and “in the services’ best interest.”<sup>61</sup>

The 2011 Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Component identified a need to modify the way reserve component personnel are equipped.<sup>62</sup> One example which would significantly enhance the Marine Corps’ reserve integration and readiness would be to modify the existing process for issue of individual combat clothing and equipment. Because this is a cumbersome and time-consuming process, requiring intense manpower commitment, the active component contracted management of this process years ago resulting in cost savings and improved readiness rates. Yet, despite the active component’s successfully proven process, the reserve component still continues to manage the requisition, receipt, inventory, issue, return, and disposal of hundreds of items that make up individual combat clothing and equipment inventory throughout over 180 sites across the United States. The reserve component should seek to follow the example of the active component to capitalize on cost savings and ease the burden of managing this process from various reserve training centers scattered throughout America. Each reserve center could have an on-hand inventory for fitting with appropriate sizes when Marines check into their unit. Then, personnel would enter the data online and have the assets shipped directly to the individual Marine’s residence where he or she would sign a custody receipt with carrier confirming the shipment. The reserve component could arrange for an expansion of the existing active component contract or establish an independent contract tailored to meet the

peculiar needs associated with the geographical dispersion of the reserves. Harnessing the active component's lessons learned with individual combat clothing and equipment would serve to expedite the process of establishing an efficiently run supply operation while saving the reserve component a considerable amount of manpower and money.

With the Afghanistan conflict drawing to a close, supplemental funding that has been the lifeblood, in terms of sustaining the operational reserve, will cease to exist. However, the Marine Corps presence in Iraq has come to an end and the current administration has set dates for a withdrawal from Afghanistan. With an end date in the not-too-distant future, comes an end to the supplemental funding that has been the lifeblood for sustaining the operational reserve. The predictability so critical to success of an operational reserve diminishes quickly as the active component is now freed up to take over the other operational roles which the reserves have been filling.

*Reversibility* is the latest concept within the Department of Defense, describing a solution for national strategy in the face of deep budget cuts and force reductions. This is not a novel concept; rather, this is simply a new word meant to pacify those who are skeptical of the reduction in defense budgets and troop drawdown. The *Defense Budget Priorities and Choices* released in January 2012 indicates that the Department is placing its bet on the active component being able to quickly re-grow the force and stated: "a strong Reserve Component is a vital element of the concept of reversibility."<sup>63</sup> Based on this language, reserve component opportunities for operational use seems almost guaranteed. According to Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy, the plan is to retain corporate knowledge gained over the past decade in the reserve component, so that if required, the force can be rebuilt based on experience.<sup>64</sup> This is not a realistic concept despite the introduction of the concept of

“reversibility.” How realistic is it for an organization to give up their experienced employees and hope to reconstitute the skills and efficiency that were eliminated in a short time frame? In truth, this term is simply a new name for an old pattern which has led to the same challenges at the onset of each conflict the U.S. has entered. Each time it has resulted in the military having to play catch-up and military historian Victor Hanson does not think it is possible to do this as has been advertised by the Defense Department.<sup>65</sup> Simply put, “reversibility” means: capable of being reversed, essentially restorable or returnable to a previous state.<sup>66</sup> In this case, it is a play on words in an attempt to soften the reality that the force is being downsized and is based on the premise that, if required, it will be built back up fast enough to respond to a requirement. The assumption is that it can be done with the experienced leadership retained from the actions of the past ten years.

The challenge is determining where the Marine Corps Reserve fits into this. Unaffected by force reductions, the Marine Corps Reserve would, if required by events, be mobilized to meet the needs of the nation.<sup>67</sup> The Reserve would adapt to meet the demand until such a time that a requirement no longer exists or an expansion of the active component is required to generate additional force structure to satisfy a change in the national security strategy which is what occurred as a result of the ten years following September 11, 2001. After World War I, the question revolved around whether or not public funds should be spent on a reserve that could not be guaranteed to be useful in peace or in time of emergency.<sup>68</sup> In 2012, unlike the 1920’s, the nation and the Marine Corps in particular have learned well the value of a ready reserve, just as it had in 1950 when the North Korean People’s Army invaded the Republic of Korea.

Despite the myriad of challenges associated with institutionalizing use of reserve forces in an operational manner, the evolutionary trend continues to progress towards easier access to

reserve forces outside of contingency operations. In 2011, Congress, acting on past recommendations and pressure from the services as well as the Reserve Forces Policy Board, passed into law, authorization for the Department of Defense to call up reserves for purposes other than war or national emergency.<sup>69</sup> This is a major shift in policy considering that it previously took Presidential and Congressional approval to mobilize the reserve forces. The new law proves commitment of the nation's leadership to building a truly ready, accessible and capable reserve. However, access is only half of the solution for utilization of the reserve. The Department of Defense will need funding to support the "easy" access that it now has to the reserve force.

### **Conclusion**

The old expression "the writing is on the wall" seems to apply in the case of the Marine Corps operational reserve. In the President's 2012 Strategic Guidance, he points out that the United States is in a transition. Use of the word "transition" indicates a known destination for the immediate future. The document mentions "end today's wars" two separate times and it directly addresses the fact that mandatory defense spending reductions will occur.<sup>70</sup> Further expressed in the President's 2012 strategic guidance regarding the reserve is, "The expected pace of operations over the next decade will be a significant driver in determining an appropriate AC/RC mix and level of RC readiness."<sup>71</sup> Stated differently, "demand" will determine the role the reserve will play. The President's message is clear and, once again, the same pattern has emerged: the ending of war (in this case two wars), reduction of the defense budget, and downsizing of the military. While the Marine Corps Reserve will be spared from any manpower reductions in the 2013 budget, there is little doubt that it will be reduced in operational mission opportunities as the active component seeks to fulfill its traditional role.<sup>72</sup>

The United States has recognized, over the course of the past decade, an evolution of the Total Force concept, as the reserve shifted to an operational role to meet the nation's needs. For the Marine Corps Reserve, the challenge will be to preserve the operational experience of the force while at the same time meeting the expectation of a generation of reservists that have become accustomed to being operationally employed. In the near future, the Marine Corps will face the choice of funding an operational reserve or settling for a reserve that conducts annual training missions in support of combatant commander missions. Integration of the reserve component with the active component has proven critical to success of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this chapter of reserve mobilization is coming to a close. Currently, the reserve appears, without choice, to be bound to the same patterns of the past and destined to repeat those patterns. Despite these challenges, just as it has always done in the past; the reserve force will continue to evolve in order to meet the emerging requirements of the Marine Corps and the national security interests of the United States.

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